

Russian Space Bomb Peril Aired on Hill

By George C. Wilson

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The Soviet Union's new orbital rocket "is less of a threat" than her ICBMs the Pentagon's research chief told Congress yesterday.

John S. Foster Jr. made the statement before uneasy members of the Military Applications Subcommittee of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee.

Chairman Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) said the Soviet advance dictates an upgrading of U.S. space defenses. Sen. Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine) contended the rocket "confirms the obsolescence" of the missile defense the U.S. intends to build for \$5 billion.

Foster defended the anti-ballistic-missile system, declaring it would provide the U.S. with a "high assurance of no fatalities" from a Chinese missile attack well into the 1980s. Without the ABM, Foster said, the U.S. would have "tremendous losses" if even as few as 10 or 20 Chinese ICBMs hit.

The Soviets' new weapon is called the Fractional Orbital Bombardment System, or FOBS. The idea is to evade existing U.S. warning nets by outflanking them.

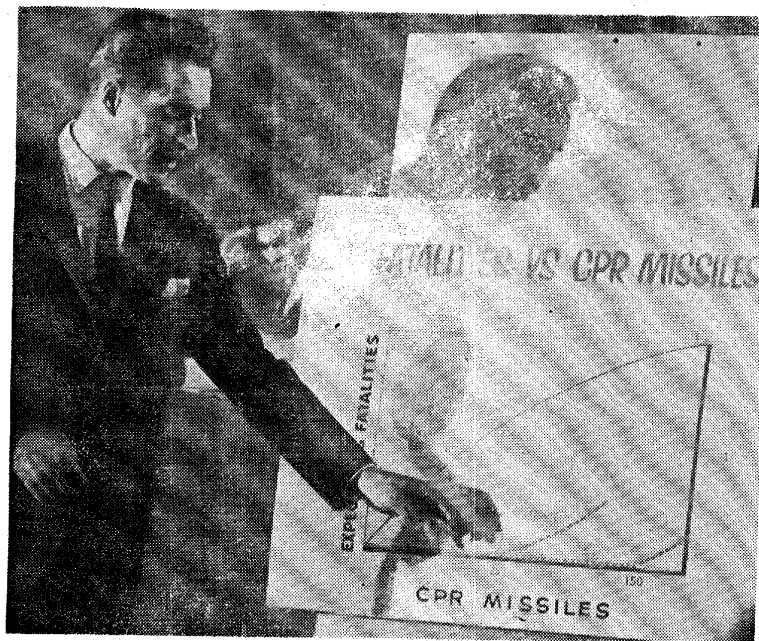
Down Under Approach

One approach—and the one intelligence leaders believe Russia is testing now—is to launch a rocket at the U.S. the long way, down under the Southern Hemisphere, rather than over the North Pole route that ICBMs would follow. The rocket would go into orbit and then release a bomb when over the U.S.

A second approach—one Foster raised as a possibility yesterday—is to fly under the radar beams guarding the northern approaches to the U.S. He said the Soviets may be looking for "a tunnel to scoot through."

Neither way is as effective as delivering a bomb by missile or airplane, Foster said. He said the U.S. has a new over-the-horizon radar which even negates the chance of surprise attack by FOBS.

But the Pentagon weapons chief did concede the U.S. has no way to knock down FOBS nor to determine whether an



EXPLAINS SYSTEM—John S. Foster Jr., Pentagon research chief, explains a chart on the U.S. missile defense to the Joint Atomic Energy subcommittee yesterday.

By Wally McNamee—The Washington Post

orbiting rocket is carrying a nuclear bomb.

Rather than rush into development of a new anti-satellite weapon, Foster said the Defense Department will rely primarily on a convincing offense to deter a Soviet attack by FOBS or any other device.

Trend Is to Small Bombs

Paul H. Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense who testified along with Foster, said the Pentagon would keep improving this offense so any aggressor would see an attack on the U.S. as suicidal.

Such an offense, he said, cannot be measured in megatons alone. He declared the trend in both the U.S. and Russia rely on a large number of small bombs to overwhelm the defense.

The megatonnage argument arose when Rep. Craig Hosmer (R-Calif.), a subcommittee member, said Secretary of Defense James Earl Ray refused to recognize the Soviet

pendant" for big bombs and rockets which might destroy U.S. ICBMs before they could strike back.

Hosmer said FOBS might be designed to destroy U.S. missile forces, rather than bombers, as McNamara suspects. The congressman called for building more ICBMs and a missile defense against the Soviets as well as the planned one against the Chinese.

The first day of subcommittee hearings, which Jackson said will continue into next year, brought these disclosures by Foster and Nitze about FOBS:

- The U.S. detected FOBS flights with new over-the-horizon radar which can see over the curve of the earth because its signals bounce around the world rather than travel in a straight line.

- The Soviet orbital rocket is not the 120-foot-long Scrag as many Western Square—as many Western

other possibility is the really big Soviet ICBM, the SS-9, which has a 25 megaton warhead. The Soviet Minuteman—the SS-11—is too small for the job.

- FOBS has not flown over the U.S. proper so far but could do so without violating the space treaty as long as it flew less than a full orbit. Nitze said such a flight would not be a violation even if a bomb were aboard.

- Soviet FOBS launches were detected by the new U.S. over-the-horizon radar—equipment which Foster said the Pentagon intends to spend "a few tens of millions on over the next two years."

- "To be a serious threat," Foster said, the Soviets would have to put a "whole bunch" of FOBS into orbit. At that point, the U.S. would send its bombers aloft—a poor trade-off for the Soviets, Foster said.

- While the U.S. could not knock down FOBS in one orbit or less, Foster said weapons in hand could do so if the rocket went around the world more than once.

- The Nike X anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) defense would "be more than adequate to take care of any array" of FOBS the Chinese might launch.

Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said called FOBS one of the "big scares put out every now and then to fortify our determination to spend all our money on armaments and weapons. I do not think there is any immediate great danger."